

# Assassination Unit Is Left in Limbo

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The House Rules Committee left the House assassination inquiry in limbo for another week yesterday after a day-long hearing produced a stream of demands that it be kept under tight control.

Presiding over his first meeting as Rules Committee chairman, Rep. James J. Delaney (D-N.Y.), postponed action on a resolution to re-establish the Select Committee on Assassinations until next Tuesday. Three witnesses are still to be heard.

He said he favors sending the controversial resolution submitted by members of the assassinations committee to the House floor largely intact so that most of the issues raised yesterday can be decided by the House. By contrast, the Rules Committee's Republican minority, especially Rep. James Quillen (R-Tenn.), expressed a keener interest in rewriting the resolution in the Committee because it has original jurisdiction.

Fighting to keep the assassinations inquiry alive, Chairman-designate Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.) said he was confident the committee would never permit the use of polygraphs and psychological stress evaluators as chief counsel Richard A. Sprague has proposed. Gonzalez said the panel could live with a budget ceiling in the enabling resolution if the House insisted on it.

"When the House says at noon that it's midnight," Gonzalez said with an air of wry resignation, "I go home and turn the lights on."

The committee last month had enforced a proposed first-year budget of \$6.5 million for its investigation into the deaths of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., but since has abandoned all talk of seeking that much in light of the criticisms it produced. Gonzalez hinted yesterday that he might be satisfied with a \$500,000 start so long as it was understood that the committee could come back for more if it was making good progress.

Much of the criticism centered on Sprague, a former Philadelphia prosecutor used to running his own show. In testimony yesterday afternoon, Rep. Robert E. Bauman (R-Md.) said he thought Sprague should resign.

Bauman predicted the investigation would "turn into a circus that will raise more questions than they can answer."

Under questioning by Rep. Trent Lott (R-La.), Gonzalez insisted that he could control Sprague and oversee a professional, efficient investigation free of the budgetary and civil liberties controversies of the past month.

The embattled Sprague had other defenders in Rep. Richardson Preyer (D-N.C.), a former federal judge who would head the subcommittee investigating the Kennedy assassination, and in Rep. Samuel Devine (R-Ohio), a former FBI agent who was assigned to the assassinations committee as its ranking GOP member after voting against its creation last September.

"I think he [Sprague] has already demonstrated that he's not a great diplomat," Preyer said. "What he's also demonstrated is he is very good at tracking down killers."

The postponement to next Tuesday came about because the House Democratic caucus will go into session today, preventing the Rules Committee from resuming its hearing today. Delaney selected next Tuesday as the most convenient time to take up the issue again.

The postponement means the committee's 73-member staff will have to go at least a few more days without any pay; the committee officially went out of business Jan. 4, with the start of the 95th Congress.

It was disclosed at yesterday's hearing that 23 of those staff members were hired and put on the congressional payroll only at the last minute, as of Jan. 1. As a result, the committee has a payroll, on paper at least, of \$123,125.55 for January.

Gonzalez protested that he had not known of the extent of the last-minute hirings until yesterday.